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ABSTRACT

This issue of "Media & Values" explores the influence of mass media and violence in our society. The essays present various interpretations of that influence and the implications for the society. A special section entitled "Media and Violence Forum" contains 10 articles. Articles include: (1) "No Doubt About It - TV Violence Affects Behavior" (Leonard Eron); (2) "View From the Network: What Counts As Violence?" (Horst Stipp); (3) "Slasher Films May be Kids' Introduction to Sex" (Edward Donnerstein); (4) "Writers Tell Stories of a Violent Society" (Del Reisman); (5) "Public Policy Must Focus on Causes of Violence" (Peggy Charren); (6) "Suggestions for Parents: Children Can Unlearn Violence" (Judith Myers-Walls); (7) "Canada Adopts Plan to Ban Violence on Television" (H. Brooke Primero); (8) "How to Analyze the Media for Violence" (Barbara Osborn); (9) "Watch, Read, Listen: Resources on Violence in the Media"; and (10) "Beyond Blame: Media Literacy as Violence Prevention" (Elizabeth Thoman). Other articles in the issue are (1) "Making Connections"; (2) "Babylon Revisited" (Walter Wink); (3) "Strung Out on Aggression" (Charles M. Johnston); (4) "Growing Up Violent" (David Barry); and (5) "A Tale of Three Countries" (Brandon Centerwall). (EH)

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Media&Values

A Cornerstone of the Media Literacy Movement

ED 407 360

MEDIA AND VIOLENCE

Part One: Making the Connections

SO 028 481

What the Research Says *p. 8*

The Myth of Redemptive Violence *p. 3*

Canada's Plan to Ban TV Violence *p. 20*

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Media&Values

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Media&Values is published quarterly by the Center for Media and Values, an educational not-for-profit membership organization that believes a concern for values in today's media age is not so much knowing all the answers as asking the right questions. The Center is dedicated to the development of a media literate citizenry whose members will have at their command a new way of thinking about and interacting with the media in their lives.

The Center also creates and publishes innovative learning tools — Media Literacy Workshop Kits™ — to empower adults and youth as critical viewers and consumers of media in today's "image culture." As a leading U.S. voice of the worldwide media literacy movement, the Center organizes forums and conferences and maintains an extensive information and resource library on the media issues of our time. Funding for the Center comes from memberships, individual donations, foundation grants and organizational cosponsorships of issues and kits.

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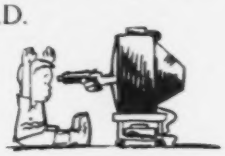

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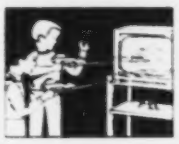

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

Media's Role in Our Culture of Violence

By Elizabeth Thoman
Executive Director

When Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D., assistant dean of Harvard University's School of Public Health, begins one of her eloquent speeches on the growing crisis of violence as a public health issue in society, she often recounts the story of a young gunshot victim being treated in a Boston hospital emergency room. He expressed surprise that his wound *actually* hurt.

"I thought, boy, he's really stupid, anybody knows that if you get shot, it's going to hurt. But it dawned on me that what he sees on television is that when the superhero gets shot in the arm, he uses that arm to hold onto a truck going 85 miles an hour around a corner. He overcomes the driver and shoots a couple of hundred people while he's at it."

We must not overlook the powerful potential of media literacy education to reduce the impact and challenge the pervasiveness of violence in our media and popular culture.

Facing the Facts

For decades, media writers, directors and producers have been trying to tell us that the violent content of the media they create also *doesn't hurt*, that is, that despite its glamour and impact, it plays no role in making this a more violent society.

They may have had a case earlier in this century when portrayals of media violence were less believable, but today the proliferation of realistic-looking mayhem, assault and death makes for a totally different situation. One expert believes that of the 23,000 murders committed in the United States every year (the greatest number of any industrialized country), at least half are due to the influence and desensitizing effects of media violence. At minimum, media violence may be most influential in modeling the use of deadly force as the primary, if not the only, way to solve problems and resolve interpersonal conflict.

Many blame media for the rise in violence, but of course that's not the whole story. It's also clear that overcrowding, pervasive life-long poverty, hunger, joblessness and drug addiction — as well as the ready availability of guns — also contribute to our skyrocketing homicide rate. But the media connection can no longer be ignored.

Some of the details of this connection might be questioned. Maybe the numbers could be debated. But the fact that a connection exists is hard to dispute. Which leads us to an inescapable conclusion: Something must be done.

For years, like other communicators, I believed that tolerating some things I didn't like in media—including depictions of violence—was the price we paid for a free and open public discourse.

Taking Action

Of course, our First Amendment protections are still important. But so are the thousands of lives being lost every year. The issue, I believe, is no longer one of protecting free speech but of protecting human life; it is not a question of censoring ideas but of changing behaviors that are endangering the health and safety of every citizen, young and old. If media is part of the problem, we think media literacy can contribute to the solution.

As American citizens, their Congressional representatives and the leaders of the media industry wrestle with the First Amendment issues involved in reducing the incidences of violence in public media, we must not overlook the powerful potential of media literacy education to reduce the impact and challenge the pervasiveness of violence in media and popular culture.

There are, unfortunately, few published resources available for the task of media literacy education on the theme of violence, whether for children or adults. Therefore, at the Center for Media and Values, we are embarking on the development of a comprehensive community education resource package on media and violence that will meet this need.

This issue of *Media&Values* is the first of two on the subject and focuses primarily on "Making the Connections" between the violence on the screen and violence in the street. The next issue, subtitled "Searching for Solutions," will explore the content of media violence, why the current rating system doesn't work and creative options for changing the climate for violence by both media producers *and* their audiences.

Together, the two issues will form the conceptual cornerstone of a multimedia package that will include a Leader's Guide packed with innovative media literacy lesson plans and activities to use with children, young people and adults, a documentary video to use for community education, posters for public awareness and "take home" booklets for parents and caretakers.

This is a most ambitious undertaking for the Center. Though called to the task, we know we can't do it alone; it will require a community of interest and involvement to succeed.

Now more than ever, we invite your participation in the media literacy movement and encourage you to collaborate, cosponsor or otherwise help us fund this significant educational resource. Working together, we can develop the strategies and tools needed to rediscover the roots of a caring culture. It *is* possible... if we begin *now*.

BABYLON REVISITED

How Our Violent Origins Resurface in Today's Media

By Walter Wink

Violence is the ethos of our times. It is the spirituality of the modern world. What is generally overlooked is that violence is accorded the status of a religion, demanding from its devotees an absolute obedience-unto-death.

Its followers are not aware that the devotion they pay to violence is a form of religious piety, however. Violence is so successful as a myth precisely because it does not appear to be mythic in the least. Violence simply appears to be the nature of things. It is what works. It seems inevitable, the last and, often, the first resort in conflicts. It is embraced with equal alacrity by people on the Left and on the Right, by religious liberals as well as religious conservatives.

The roots of this devotion to violence are deep, and we will be well rewarded if we trace them to their source. When we do, we will discover that the religion of Babylon—one of the world's oldest continuously surviving religions—is thriving as never before in contemporary life...it, and not Christianity, is the real religion of [the United States].

FROM W.H. WARD "SEAL CYLINDERS OF WESTERN ASIA"

Jesus taught the love of enemies, but Babylonian religions taught their extermination. Violence was, for the religion of ancient Mesopotamia, what love was for Jesus: the central dynamic of existence. For this early civilization, life was as cruel as the floods and droughts and storms that swept the Fertile Crescent. Recurrent warfare between the various city-states in the region exhausted resources. Chaos threatened every achievement of humanity. The myth that enshrined that culture's sense of life was the *Enuma Elish*, dated to around 1250 B.C.E. in the versions that have survived, but based on traditions considerably older.

In the beginning, according to this myth, Apsu and Tiamat (the sweet and saltwater oceans) bear Mummu (the mist). From them also issue the younger gods, whose frolicking makes so much noise that the elder gods resolve to kill them so they can sleep. This plot of the elder gods is discovered, the younger gods kill Apsu, and Tiamat pledges revenge.

The rebel gods in terror run for salvation to their youngest, Marduk. He exacts a steep price: If he succeeds, he must be given chief and undisputed power in the assembly of the gods. Having extorted this promise, he catches Tiamat in a net, blows her full of an evil wind, shoots an arrow that bursts her distended belly and pierces her heart; he then splits her skull with a club, and scatters the blood in the out-of-the-way places. He stretches out her corpse full length, and from it creates the cosmos.

We are indebted to Paul Ricoeur for his profound commentary on this myth. He points out that in the Babylonian myth, creation is an act of violence: Tiamat is murdered, dismembered, and from her cadaver the world is formed. Order is established by means of disorder...The origin of evil precedes the origin of things. Chaos (symbolized by Tiamat) is prior to order (represented by Marduk, god of Babylon). Evil is prior to good. Violence inheres in the godhead. Evil is an ineradicable constituent of ultimate reality, and possesses ontological priority over good.

Good vs. Evil

The biblical myth [we are familiar with] is diametrically opposed to all this. There, a good God creates a good creation. Chaos does not resist order. Good is...prior to evil. Neither evil nor violence is a part of the creation, but enter as a result of the first couple's sin and the machinations of the "serpent." A basically good reality is thus corrupted by free decisions reached by creatures. In this far more complex and subtle explanation of the origins of things, evil for the first time emerges as a problem requiring solution.

In the Babylonian myth, however, there is no "problem of evil." Evil is simply a primordial fact...Our very origin is violence. Killing is in our blood. Humanity is not the originator of evil, but merely finds evil already present and perpetuates it...We are the consequences of deicide. Cosmic order results from the violent suppression of the female (Tiamat) and is mirrored in the social order by the oppression of women by men...

Thus, human beings are naturally incapable of peaceful coexistence; order must

continually be imposed upon us from on high. Nor are we created to subdue the Earth and have dominion over it; we exist but to serve as slaves of the gods and of their earthly [representatives]...

Do you begin to sense where all this is leading?

The ultimate outcome of this type of myth, remarks Ricoeur, is a theology of war founded on the identification of the enemy with the powers that the god has vanquished, and continues to vanquish, in the drama of creation. Every coherent theology of holy war ultimately reverts to this basic mythological type... According to this theology, the enemy is evil and war is its punishment. Unlike the biblical myth, which sees evil as an intrusion into a good creation and war as a consequence of the fall, this myth regards war as present from the beginning...

This myth is the original religion of the status quo, the first articulation of "might makes right." The gods favor those who conquer. The mass of people exists to perpetuate that power and privilege which the gods have conferred upon the king, the aristocracy, and the priesthood. Religion exists to legitimate power and privilege. Life is combat.

Thus the myth of redemptive violence has become the cornerstone of foreign policy, enshrined in the doctrine of the national security state. Might is right.

The Myth Today

This myth of redemptive violence inundates us on every side. We are awash in it yet seldom perceive it. Its simplest, most pervasive, and finally most influential form, where it captures the imaginations of each new generation, is children's comics and cartoon shows.

Here is how the myth of redemptive violence structures the standard comic strip or television cartoon sequence: An indestructible good guy is unalterably opposed to an irreformable and equally indestructible bad guy. Nothing can kill the good guy, though for the first three-quarters of the strip or show he (rarely she) suffers grievously, appearing hopelessly trapped, until somehow the hero breaks free, vanquishes the villain, and restores order until the next installment. Nothing finally destroys the bad guy or prevents his reappearance, whether he is soundly trounced, jailed, drowned or shot into outer space.

The psychodynamics of the TV cartoon or comic book are marvelously simple: Children identify with the good guy so that they can think of themselves as good. This enables them to project out onto the bad guy their own repressed anger, violence, rebelliousness or lust, and then vicariously to enjoy their own evil by watching the bad guy initially prevail. (This segment of the show actually consumes all but the closing minutes, allowing ample time for indulging the shadow side of the self). When the good guy finally wins, viewers are then able to reassert control over thier own inner tendencies, repress them, and reestablish a sense of goodness. Salvation is guaranteed through identification with the hero.

Cartoon strips like *Superman* and *Dick Tracy* have been enormously successful in resolving the guilt feelings of the reader or viewer by providing totally evil, often deformed and inhuman scapegoats on whom one can externalize the evil side of one's own personality and disown it without coming to any insight or awareness of its presence within oneself. The villain's punishment provides catharsis; one forswears the villain's ways and heaps condemnation on him in a guilt-free orgy of aggression.

No premium is put on reasoning, persuasion, negotiation or diplomacy. There can be no compromise with an absolute evil. [It] must be totally annihilated or totally converted.

Lawless Solutions

The classic gunfighters of the "Western" settle old scores by shootouts, never by due process of law. The law, in fact, is suspect, too weak to prevail in the condition of near-anarchy that fiction has misrepresented as the Wild West. The gunfighter must take matters into his own hands, just as, in the anarchic situation of the big city... (in movies such as *Dirty Harry*... and, in real life, [the violent reactions of] Bernard Goetz) a beleaguered citizen finally rises up against the crooks... and creates justice out of the barrel of a gun.

As Robert Jewett points out, this vigilantism betrays a profound distrust of democratic institutions, and of the reliance on human intelligence and civic responsibility that are basic to the democratic hope (the movie *High Noon*). It regards the general public as passive and unwise, incapable of discerning evil and making a rational response. Public resources are inadequate, so the message goes; we need a messiah, an armed redeemer, someone who has the strength of character and conviction to transcend the legal restraints of democratic institutions and save us from an evil easily identifiable in villainous persons.

These vigilantes who deliver us by taking the law into their own hands will somehow do so without encouraging lawlessness. They will kill and leave town, thus ridding us of guilt. They will show selfless and surpassing concern for the health of our communities, but they will never have to practice citizenship, or deal with the ambiguity of political decisions. They neither run for office nor vote. They will reignite in us a consuming love for impartial justice, but they will do so by means of a mission of personal vengence that eliminates the due process of law.

"Arnold Schwarzenegger has become an American Icon, worshipped as the God Violent Power by the disenfranchised and powerless masses."

Carole Lieberman, M.D., National Coalition on Television Violence

The possibility that an innocent person is being executed by our violent redeemers is removed by having the outlaw draw first, or shoot from ambush. The villain dresses in dark clothing, is swarthy, unshaven and filthy, and his personality is stereotyped so as to eliminate any possibility of audience sympathy. The death of such evil beings is necessary in order to cleanse society of a stain. The viewer, far from feeling remorse at another human being's death, is actually made euphoric. Some movie audiences actually stand and cheer when the villain is

blown away...

Rather than shoring up democracy, the strong-man methods of the superheroes of popular culture reflect a nostalgia for simpler solutions. They bypass constitutional guarantees of legal procedure in arrest, or an appreciation for the tenet that a person is to be regarded as innocent until proven guilty.

What we see instead is a mounting impatience with the laborious processes of civilized life and a restless eagerness to embrace violent solutions. Better to mete out instant, summary justice than risk the red tape and delays and bumbling of the courts. The yearning for a messianic redeemer who will set things right is thus, in its essence, a totalitarian fantasy...

Violent Lessons

The myth of redemptive violence is the simplest, laziest, most exciting, uncomplicated, irrational and primitive depiction of evil the world has ever known. Furthermore, its orientation toward evil is one into which virtually all modern children (boys especially) are socialized in the process of maturation...

Estimates vary widely, but the average child is reported to log roughly 36,000 hours of television by the time she or he is 18, including some 15,000 murders. In prime-time evening shows, our children are served up about 16 acts of entertaining violence (two of them lethal) every night; on the weekend the level of violent acts almost doubles (30.3). By the age of 16, the average child spends as much time watching TV as in school.

From the earliest age, children are awash in depictions of violence as the ultimate solution in human conflicts. And saturation in the myth does not end with the close of adolescence. There is no rite of passage... but rather a years-long acclimatization to adult television and movie fare. Redemptive violence gives way to violence as an end in itself [in] a religion in which violence has become the ultimate concern, an elixir, an addictive high, a substitute for relationships.

The modern individual, stripped of the values, rites and customs that give a sense of belonging to traditional cultures, is the easy victim of the fads of style, opinion and prejudice fostered by the communications media... people live under the illusion that the views and feelings they have acquired by attending to the media are their own. Overwhelmed by the gigantism of corporations, bureaucracies, universities and the military, individuals sense that the only escape from utter insignificance lies in identifying with these giants and idolizing them... one's personal well-being is tied inextricably with the fortunes of the hero-leader. Right and wrong scarcely enter the picture.

Thus the myth of redemptive violence has become the cornerstone of foreign policy, enshrined in the doctrine of the national security state. Might is right. Everything depends on victory, success, the thrill of belonging to a nation capable of imposing its will in the heavenly council and among the nations. For the alternative–ownership of one's own evil and acknowledgement of God in the enemy–is for many simply too high a price to pay.

Walter Wink is a professor of biblical interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City. Reprinted by permission from his book Engaging the Powers, *copyright © 1992, Augsburg Fortress, this selection is an edited version of an article published in* Sojourners *in April 1992.*

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STRUNG OUT ON AGGRESSION:
Has the American Dream Become a Violent Nightmare?

By Charles M. Johnston, M.D.

When we consider media violence, we think first of television's increasingly violent content. We fear that a populace incessantly bombarded with the images, sounds and emotions of shootings, bombings and rapes will become desensitized to such violent acts—or worse, learn to think of them as valid responses to life's growing stresses. The evidence suggests these fears are valid.

But media violence also affects us at a deeper and ultimately more problematic level. To make these connections, we must look beyond the literal content on the screen to the subliminal dynamics that animate them, as well as the social context that gives them their power.

Violence as a Drug

An analogy can help. As a futurist, I am frequently asked to address the background and expected developments of various problems plaguing today's world. In talking about the drug crisis, for example, I might comment that while it is most frequently framed as a moral crisis—a problem created by the bad actions of people who should be doing good—I see it more as a crisis of cultural purpose. We find ourselves in times when significant portions of the population are ingesting substances that mimic real meaning—real excitement, real power, real passion, real spirituality—rather than taking the life risks required to provide meaning as authentic experience.

The dynamics of media violence work in a similar way. At a psychological level, the drama and titillation of these violent scenarios and our identification with their heroes and heroines serve to create a sense of excitement, potency and significance that is missing from most people's daily lives.

Beneath these secondary influences lie effects more directly neurological in nature. Here, it is less violence per se—behavior driven by anger or aggression—that hooks us to violent programming than the generalized rush of adrenalin we feel in response to violent situations presented to us. As good action/adventure directors know, a car chase or a plane crash—or even just an explosion—can be as effective as a premeditated shooting in keeping our attention glued to the screen.

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The addictive power of this generalized stimulation is illustrated all too vividly by a classic experiment with rats. Wires are inserted directly into excitement centers in the rat's brain, then attached to a depressible pedal in its cage. After discovering the connection between the pedal and the pleasure it brings, the rat depresses the pedal with growing frequency. Gradually the animal neglects other activities. In time it even forgets to eat—and starves to death.

Jolts per Minute

Programmers learned long ago that, as with the rat, regular jolts of empty stimulation are the easiest and cheapest means of keeping viewers glued to the screen. Thus, "jolts per minute" programming has come to pervade not only the action/adventure genre, but nearly every aspect of media. Soap operas and afternoon talk shows prosper through their ability to whip up polarized emotions. And the evening news, sold as television's time for serious analysis, has increasingly become an ever more predictable litany of each day's killings and disasters. Serious information is secondary at best.

While media violence can thus be directly addictive, we must go beyond this awareness to fully understand its deeper dynamics. Addiction on a broad scale requires more than an addictive substance; it requires as well social circumstances that support the addictive response. As we watch our children—and often ourselves—hypnotized by violence on the screen, we have to ask: Why don't we all cry out in protest, why don't we "just say no?" The question returns us to the notion of a cultural crisis of purpose.

Addiction in individuals occurs when a person stops seeing a reason to risk the vulnerability required for real fulfillment. A drug may be so powerful that it simply replaces the struggle to build a satisfying life. Or sometimes a person's life circumstances make fulfillment of normal dreams and desires unlikely. But usually there is something more fundamental, more at the level of meaning. The person's life story has become inadequte to

inspire him or her to live life fully.

Statistics such as the doubling of teen suicide over the last 10 years suggest all too graphically that, for many, our cultural story has become inadequate to inspire full participation in life. We find ourselves in the awkward position of telling youth to "just say no" while we ourselves are often unable to articulate a vision of the future that deeply and compellingly says "yes."

An Empty Dream

The role of cultural purpose in the dynamics of violence—and particularly in the increasingly disturbing phenomena of random violence—came home strongly for me when I prepared for a number of speeches I made following the April 1992 civil disturbances in South Central Los Angeles. While reviewing the events of those days, I realized that the driving force behind the rioting changed over time. In its early hours, it seemed to be driven mostly by anger and frustration—ultimately the anger and frustration of people who felt they had little chance of winning at the American Dream. But as the violence became more and more chaotic and random in its targets, it seemed driven less by doubts about participants' chances for success in gaining the American Dream than by knowing at some level that even winning would mean little, that the dream itself had become empty. This ultimate despair became a force for destruction.

The addicting power of violence—both real and in the media—increases exponentially during times of transition, those times when a familiar story has ceased to provide inspiration and a new one has yet to take its place. At these times, people are particularly vulnerable to using both violence itself and the witnessing of violent actions to inject themselves with excitement, engagement, and influence—feelings lacking in their own lives. And random violence—violence as undifferentiated stimulation—becomes particularly addictive in a new way. Its power to give voice to the feelings of fear and chaos so central to these times while hiding them from us through its empty intensity has a peculiar attraction.

A Two-Part Cure

The cure for our addiction to media violence lies in two related tasks. We must first teach the basics of media literacy to help people distinguish between genuine feelings of excitement born from true fulfillment and the seductive pseudo-excitement of empty consumable stimulation. Successful media literacy education counters people's susceptibility to manipulation by violence's hypnotic effects. It provides both insight into how these effects work and an emotional climate that supports people's natural desire to be in charge of their lives—to escape harm and to avoid manipulation.

Successful media literacy education counters people's susceptibility to manipulation by violence's hypnotic effects.

The second part of the solution defines the fundamental challenge of our time—to work together to write the much-needed next chapter in our cultural story. Like the drug epidemic, most of the critical crises of our time are really crises of purpose demanding not just revised policies, but new defining metaphors, new ways of talking about what matters. They challenge us to a unique and critical kind of conversation at all levels: in our schools, in community meetings, in government at all levels, in boardrooms, between friends and family members.

Ultimately, those at risk will be able to say no to the seductions of violent pseudo-excitement and pseudo-meaning only to the degree they experience real excitement and real meaning as possible and worth the risk. The deadening attraction of media violence will diminish to the exact degree its potency is countered by a newly mature and compelling collective cultural vision.

Charles M. Johnston, M.D., is a psychiatrist, futurist and director of the Institute for Creative Development, a think tank and center for leadership training in Seattle, Washington. He is the author of The Creative Imperative *(1986) and* Necessary Wisdom: Meeting the Challenge of a New Cultural Maturity *(1991).*

Re:ACTION

Measuring Jolts Per Minute

"Jolts per minute" programming is often cited as a principle—almost a first law—of commercial television. "Jolt" refers to the moment of excitement generated by a laugh, a violent act, a car chase, quick film cut—any fast-paced episode that lures the viewer into the program. Television and screen writers often inject a jolt into their scripts to liven up the action or pick up the pace of a story.

Measuring the jolts per minute is a good way to discover how violence is used to keep the viewer's interest. When we consider the sheer number of violent acts we're exposed to for the sake of maintaining our attention, we can begin to understand how we're "jolted" into believing that the only thing that can keep our interest *is* violence. Here are some things you can do to keep from getting over-jolted:

- Ask yourself what type of jolts of violence are most common? Are there some that are more persuasive than others? Consider alternatives to using violent jolts. Would a joke work in place of a fist fight? How would this affect the story?

- Observe promos for upcoming television shows. Are the clips mostly scenes of violence? Are there more violent jolts in movie promos or news promos? Is there a consistent number of jolts in all promos? Do the promos get more violent at certain hours?

- MTV has gained a reputation for quick edits and splashy graphics. How many of these cuts are scenes of violence? Are the quick cuts themselves acts of violence to our senses? What types of videos use more jolts of violence than others?

Based on media awareness activities in Media Literacy Resource Guide 1989, *Ministry of Education, Ontario, Canada.*

GROWING UP VIOLENT:

Decades of Research Link Screen Mayhem With Increase in Aggressive Behavior

By David S. Barry

If you were a teenager in the 1950s, you remember the shock effect of news headlines about the new specter of juvenile delinquency. The book *The Amboy Dukes* and the movies *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause* were deeply alarming in their portrayal of teenagers willing to defy their school teachers and beat up other students. The violence portrayed in those stories, terrifying as it was, consisted almost entirely of assaults with fists and weapons which left victims injured, but alive. It was nonlethal violence. The notion of American teenagers as killers was beyond the threshold of credibility.

Since the 1950s, America has [become] almost unrecognizable in terms of the level of criminal violence reported in everyday news stories. In looking for a root cause, one of the most obvious differences in the social and cultural fabric between postwar and prewar America is the massive and pervasive exposure of American youth to television. Behavioral scientists and medical researchers have been examining screen violence as a causative element in America's crime rate since the 1950s. Study after study has been published showing clear evidence of a link. And researchers say that the evidence continues to be ignored as the violence steadily worsens.

The statistics about children and screen violence—particularly that shown on television—are grim. You've probably seen figures that show an average of 28 hours of weekly TV watching by children from ages two to 11. For prime-time programming, which contains an average of five violent acts per hour, that works out to 100 acts of violence seen each week, 5,000 a year. But children also watch cartoons, which contain far more violence than adult programming. For Saturday morning cartoon shows, the violence rate spikes up to 25 acts per hour, the highest rate on TV. With children's programming added to the mix, the average child is likely to have watched 8,000 screen murders and more than 100,000 acts of violence by the end of elementary school. By the end of the teenage years, that figure will double.

ILLUSTRATION BY T. J BLANEY

Those numbers are not mere statistics. They do not occur in a social vacuum, but in a culture and society with a murder rate increasing six times faster than the population. Whether we like to acknowledge it or not, America is in the grip of an epidemic of violence so severe that homicide has become the second leading cause of death of all persons 15 to 24 years old (auto crashes are the first)—and the leading cause among African-American youth. In 1992, the U.S. Surgeon General cited violence as the leading cause of injury to women ages 15 to 44, and the U.S. Center for Disease control considers violence a leading public health issue, to be treated as an epidemic.

A Hostile America

From the 1950s to now, America has gone from being one of the safest to one of the most violent countries on earth. Here are some numbers: In 1951, with a population of 150 million, federal crime reports showed a national total of 6,820 homicides, 16,800 rapes and 52,000 robberies. For 1980, with a population of 220 million, (a 47 percent increase) the numbers were 23,000 murders, 78,920 rapes and 548,220 robberies.

In big cities, changes were more drastic. In Detroit, for instance, the 1953 murder total was 130, with 321 in New York and 82 in Los Angeles. Thirty years later, the Detroit murder tally was up to 726, the New York toll 1,665—and the Los Angeles murder total was 1,126. The fastest climbing sector of the rising crime rate is youth, with the past 10 years showing a 55 percent increase in the number of children under 18 arrested for murder. America now loses more adolescents to death by violence—especially gun violence—than to illness.

The reason these numbers belong in this discussion is that the medical community sees a direct link between screen violence and criminal behavior by viewers. In panel discus-

sions on this subject, we usually hear claims from TV and movie industry spokespersons that opinion is divided in the medical community. Different conclusions can be drawn from different studies, so the arguments go, and no clear consensus exists. Yet, the American medical establishment is clear—in print—on the subject of just such a consensus. The American Medical Association, the National Institute of Mental Health, the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, the U.S. Center for Disease Control and the American Psychological Association have concluded that study after study shows a direct causal link between screen violence and violent criminal behavior.

Causal Links

The research goes back decades. The 1968 National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence cited screen violence as a major component of the problem. The 1972 *Surgeon General's Report on TV and Behavior* cited clear evidence of a causal link between televised violence and aggressive behavior by viewers. A 10-year followup to the Surgeon General's Report by the National Institute of Mental Health added far more data in support of the causal link. The NIMH report, a massive study covering an additional 10 years of research, was clear and unequivocal in stating: "The consensus among most of the research community is that violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the programs."

A 1985 task force for the American Psychological Association Commission on Youth on Violence came to the same conclusion. A 1992 study for the APA Commission on Youth and Violence took the issue further, examining research evidence in light of its effects or implementation. The finding was that the research evidence is widely ignored. The APA report was authored by Edward Donnerstein, Ph.D., chair of the Department of Communications, University of California Santa Barbara, by Leonard Eron, Ph.D., University of Chicago and Ron Slaby of the Education Development Center, Harvard University. Their 39-page report, about to be published, states definitively that, contrary to arguments of people in the TV and motion picture industry, there is consistency and agreement in the conclusions drawn by the major medical organizations' studies of media violence.

Landmarks In the Media/Violence Connection

1950s ***Rise in youth crime and juvenile delinquency prompts congressional hearings on television violence.***

June 1952
First congressional hearings on violence in radio and television and its impact on children and youth held by House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Subcommittee.

1954
Sen. Estes Kefauver, D-Tenn., chairs hearings of Judiciary Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency on role of TV shows in youth crime. Networks say no link.

1960s ***Urban violence prompts more congressional hearings and government funding of research on TV violence.***

1967
University of Pennsylvania begins monitoring television programming.

Sept. 23, 1969
Report of National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence cites TV violence as contributor to society's violence problem.

1970s ***Surgeon general's study prompts more congressional hearings; academic studies proliferate; court cases examine liability of TV in cases of real violence.***

1972
Surgeon general's report on violence cites evidence of link between screen violence and aggressive behavior.

1975
National PTA adopts resolution demanding that networks and local TV stations reduce the amount of violence in programs and commercials (reaffirmed in 1989).

1976
American Medical Association's House of Delegates calls TV violence an "environmental hazard."

1980s ***Reagan-era deregulation gives media free rein; cable TV, VCRs and rise of independent networks diminish power of networks to control violence on TV.***

1982
National Institutes of Mental Health study says there's a clear consensus on link between TV violence and aggression.

September, 1984
Attorney General Task Force on Family Violence says evidence is overwhelming that TV violence contributes to real violence.

1984
American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Children and Television cautions physicians and parents that TV may promote aggression.

1985
American Psychological Association Commission on Youth and Violence notes research showing link between TV violence and real violence.

1990s ***Networks issue a joint statement of policies on TV violence, made possible by an antitrust exemption passed by Congress. Anti-violence advocates step up pressure.***

1990
Simon-Glickman Television Violence Act gives three major networks an antitrust exemption so they can formulate joint policy on violence. Nothing happens.

1992
American Psychological Association study shows research on link to real violence is ignored and calls for federal policy to protect society.

December 1992
Days before House hearings, the three major networks release joint violence policy and agree to an industry-wide conference.

From the Congressional Quarterly Researcher, *March, 1993.*

After discussing a massive number of studies and an extensive body of research material, Donnerstein's study quotes from the 1982 NIMH report: "In magnitude, television violence is as strongly correlated with aggressive behavior as any other behavioral variable that has been measured."

Specifically, the report noted the agreement by the NIMH, the APA and the Center for Disease Control that research data confirms that childhood watching of TV violence is directly related to criminally violent behavior later on.

Daily Assault

Adding scope to the APA report is a study recently conducted for the nonprofit Center for Media and Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. The CMPA tabulated all the violence encountered during an 18-hour broadcasting day (a Thursday) in Washington, including cable TV. The tally showed an overall average of 100 acts of violence per hour for a total of nearly 2,000 acts of violence in the 18-hour period. Most of the violence involved a gun, with murder making up one-tenth of the violent acts recorded. A breakdown by channel, or network, showed cable to be far more violent then network broadcasting. WTBS was clocked at 19 violent acts per hour, HBO at 15 per hour, USA at 14 and MTV, the youth-oriented music video channel, at 13 violent acts per hour.

The networks (except for CBS, whose violence content was skewed by the reality show *Top Cops*) were as low in violence content as PBS, which showed two violent acts per hour. ABC showed three violent acts per hour and NBC two. CBS, because of *Top Cops*, was tallied at 11 violent acts per hour. But only one-eighth of the violence occurred in adult-oriented TV entertainment. The bulk of the violence occurred in children's TV programming, with cartoons registering 25 violent incidents per hour—six times the rate of episodic TV drama. Toy commercials ranked with cartoons in violent content. Next were promos for TV shows and movies, which were four times as violent as episodic drama.

The most violent period of daily TV programming was mornings from 6 to 9 a.m. where 497 scenes of violence were recorded for an hourly rate of 165.7. Next was the 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. afternoon slot with 609 violent scenes, or 203 per hour. The morning and afternoon slots compared to 320 violent scenes in prime time, from8 p.m. to 11 p.m., or 106 per hour, and a late-night rate (from 11 p.m. to 12 a.m.) of 114.

No Consequences

In addition to recording totals, the CMPA examined the context in which the screen violence occurred. The finding was that most TV violence was shown with no visible consequences, nor any critical judgment. A significant amount of the violence occurred in movie promos, where it was shown out of context. Music videos generally present violence without comment or judgment. Similarly, violence in cartoons

I REMEMBER THE WATTS RIOT
I SAW IT THE NEXT DAY ON MY TEN-INCH BLACK-AND WHITE TV
THIS TIME I TAPED ON A REMOTE-ACTIVATED DIGITAL VCR, DIRECT FROM SIX SIMULCAST LIVE FEEDS AND WATCHED ON A NEW HIGH-RESOLUTION FORTY-INCH SPLIT-SCREEN COLOR MONITOR WITH SURROUND SOUND
TALK ABOUT PROGRESS!
©1992 JOEL PETT

Study after study shows a direct causal link between screen violence and violent criminal behavior.

29 Years of TV, 29 Years of Crime

1951:	
U.S. Population:	150 million
Murders:	6,820
Rapes:	16,800
Robberies:	52,090
1980:	
U.S. Population:	220 million
Murders:	23,000
Rapes:	78,920
Robberies:	548,220

– David Barry

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and toy commercials usually occurs without consequences or comment. More than 75 percent of the violence tallied in the study (1,640 of the nearly 2,000 violent acts) was presented with no judgment as to its acceptability as behavior. Violence was judged criminal in fewer than one-tenth of the incidents. And, ironically, while violence in episodic TV drama and TV movies for adult viewers is subject to close scrutiny for context and suitability, the bulk of the screen violence viewed by children is not.

The bulk of [TV] violence occurred in children's programming, with cartoons registering 25 violent incidents per hour–six times the rate of episodic TV dramas.

The studies mentioned above make a compelling argument, particularly when looked at as a group. But a new study, by Dr. Brandon Centerwall of the University of Washington Department of Epidemiology and Psychiatry (see related story on p. 12), takes the discussion much farther. In a study published in the June, 1992 Journal of the American Medical Association, Centerwall looked for statistical connections between the change in violent crime rates following the introduction of TV in the United States.

Centerwall found this: murder rates in Canada and the U.S. increased almost 100 percent (92 percent in Canada, 93 percent in the US, corrected for population increase) between 1945 and 1970. In both countries, the ownership of TV sets increased in almost the same proportion as the homicide rate.

Centerwall's stark and unmistakable conclusion is this: white homicide rates in Canada, the U.S. and South Africa were stable or declining until the advent of television. Then, in the course of a generation, the murder rates doubled.

The APA study by Donnerstein, Slaby and Eron also makes the point that research evidence of TV violence effects has "for decades been actively ignored, denied, attacked and even misrepresented in presentations to the American public, and popular myths regarding the effects have been perpetuated." Consequently, Donnerstein says, a major education gap exists regarding television's contribution to the problem of violence in America.

The discouraging point made in both studies is that, despite the massive research evidence of screen violence as a direct contributing factor to America's homicide rate, the screen violence level continues to rise.

As a writer deeply committed to the Constitutional guarantees against censorship, I don't like to hear the suggestion of government regulation of movies or TV. But it's time we at least face the evidence of what screen violence is doing to our children, and come to some sober conclusions about our responsibilities to the common good.

David Barry is a journalist and freelance writer as well as a TV and screenwriter. This article first appeared in the Journal of the Writers Guild of America West. *It is reprinted in slightly condensed form by permission of the author.*

From the Screen to the Street...

Six Ways Film Violence Affects Behavior

The relationship between screen violence and street violence has been studied ever since the early days of television—over 3,000 studies in the past four decades. The majority of findings have established a causal link between the violence on the screen and the violence on the streets. But what is this link exactly? *How* does the violence we watch on the screen affect our behavior? In one such study examining the effects of film violence, social science researchers Daniel Linz, Barbara J. Wilson and Barbara Randall point to six distinct characteristics of violent content in film and their affect on the viewer:

- ***Reward for Violence*** – If a violent act is rewarded or left unpunished, it is more likely to foster attitudes supportive of aggression. The lack of punishment actually functions as a sanction or a reward for violent behavior.
- ***Reality of Violence*** – The more a violent act is realistically portrayed, the more likely it is to be imitated. Older children are more emotionally responsive to programs that depict realistic events and are influenced more by violent movies that feature events that are humanly possible.
- ***Violent Role Models*** – Children are more likely to imitate and look up to characters whose use of violence is portrayed as necessary or attractive. Moreover, children who strongly identify with a violent media character are more likely to be aggressive themselves.
- ***Justified Violence*** –The more an act of violence is presented as justified, the more likely it is to be copied. Young children are more apt to hurt than to help a peer after watching a cartoon with scenes of justified violence.
- ***Violent Connections*** – Viewers who find similarity between themselves and their actions and feelings and a violent act, theme or character in a film are more likely to imitate or emulate that violence in real life. This is particularly true of children.
- ***Amount of Violence*** – Excessive exposure to media violence may produce a *psychological blunting* of normal emotional responses to violent events. It may also lead to a lack of responsiveness to real-life aggression.

Summarized from Applying Social Science Research to Film Ratings: A Shift from Offensiveness to Harmful Effects, Part I, *by Barbara J. Wilson, Daniel Linz and Barbara Randall*, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, *Volume 34, Number 4, Fall 1990.*

A TALE OF THREE COUNTRIES

Homicide Rates Rise After Television's Arrival

An interview with Brandon Centerwall, M.D.

An epidemiologist at the University of Washington and a psychiatrist in private practice, Dr. Centerwall is the author of a groundbreaking study that compares television's impact on homicide rates following its introduction in the United States and Canada in the late 1940s and South Africa in the late 1970s. He recently talked to Media&Values *Contributing Editor Barbara Osborn about the implications of the sharp rise in homicides that occurred in all three cases. Unlike previous short-term laboratory studies of TV and aggression, Centerwall's research—which focused on homicide rates among the white population of all three countries—was designed to determine the effects of exposure to television violence in childhood on adult criminal behavior. Dr. Centerwall was also hoping to determine whether studies conducted with small test samples could be generalized to larger populations. His research was reported in a major article in the* Journal of the American Medical Association *in June 1992.*

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M&V: *What results did your comparison of the data from the U.S., Canada and South Africa yield?*

Centerwall: Following the introduction of television in the United States, the white homicide rate nearly doubled. It increased by 93 percent within 10-15 years. The homicide rate in Canada, where television was introduced about the same time, also increased by 92 percent during approximately the same 10-15 year period.

During this same period in the 1950s and '60s, there was no increase in the white homicide rate in South Africa—actually there was a slight *decrease* of about seven percent. After the introduction of television in South Africa in 1975, I predicted that the white homicide rate would double in 10-15 years. By 1987, the white homicide rate had increased even more, about 130 percent.

M&V: *Why did you compare only the white populations in the U.S. and South Africa?*

Centerwall: In South Africa, whites and blacks live in very different conditions, and blacks in South Africa live under very different conditions from U.S. blacks (African Americans). I wanted to review comparable populations so I limited myself to the white population. If you compare the white populations of the U.S. and South Africa they are really quite similar in terms of economic and cultural life. Since Canada is almost entirely white, I used the total population of Canada.

M&V: *If TV has an effect on aggressive behavior, wouldn't the homocide rate go up right away?*

Centerwall: If television had an immediate effect upon those adults and teenagers who were first exposed to it in the early 1950s, the homicide rate would go up immediately. The lag of 10-15 years indicates that television violence has the greatest effect upon preadolescent children under the age of 12. Because homicide is primarily an adult activity, children have to age 10-15 years before they are old enough to commit homicides.

M&V: *Why are preadolescents susceptible to violence on television and adults are not?*

Centerwall: Children are not born with set values. Part of their maturation process is learning and establishing that set of values which they carry into adult life. That set of moral values is pretty well formed by age 12. Violence doesn't have much of an effect on adult audiences. Violence on TV has enormous effect on what adults do, but that's a result of violence viewed in childhood. Violence watched in adulthood does not change adult value systems.

M&V: *What do you make of the increasing number of homicides being committed by minors?*

Centerwall: That represents second generation effects. The first generation of children raised on TV became adults and got their value systems from TV, but they learned values from adults in their lives as well. Now we have second and third generation parents who were raised on TV. The balance of forces is not what it used to be. There's a snowballing effect.

M&V: *In your study, you say there would be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the U.S. if television had not been introduced. How did you calculate that figure?*

Centerwall: There are now approximately twice as many homicides being committed as there were in the 1950s. The increase is entirely attributable to the introduction of television. Since there are approximately 20,000 homicides each year in the United States, half of them (10,000) can be attributed to the introduction of television.

M&V: *How can you be sure other societal factors weren't responsible for the increase in homicides?*

Centerwall: First, I looked at a variety of other factors, including the baby boom, urbanization, economic trends, alcohol consumption, capital punishment, civil unrest and the availability of firearms. None of these proved able to explain these results.

Canada's inclusion in the study controls for a number of important variables. It would be plausible to attribute the 1960s increase in the U.S. homicide rate on the Vietnam War or perhaps the turbulence of the civil rights movement. However, a comparable increase in the homicide rate was observed in Canada, which was not experiencing those social movements, at the same time.

In addition, not every population in the United States acquired television at the same time. For example, in the early 1950s television sets were an expensive luxury, and the average white household acquired its first television set about five years before the average black household. Thus, a rise in the white homicide rate in the United States that preceded the black homicide rate by about five years could be predicted. According to the data, that's exactly what happened. The white homicide rate in the United States began to increase in 1958, while the black homicide rate dropped and continued to go down until four years later in 1962.

Similarly, we can look at different regions of the United States which did not acquire television at the same time. New York and New Jersey acquired television long before other states and when one looks at the data you see that those regions which acquired television earlier had an earlier increase in the homicide rate.

M&V: *You've compared the struggle to reduce violence on television with the fight to make people aware of the dangers of smoking in the 1950s and 60s. What do you mean?*

Centerwall: Conclusive evidence about the causal relationship between cigarette smoking and lung cancer was available by the mid-1950s, but it wasn't for another 10 years that the U.S. government finally endorsed the position that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer. The government lags behind the evidence in a substantial way. Today, the evidence is in on television and violence, but I anticipate that it will also take a number of years before the federal government takes a stand on the issue.

M&V: *In the meantime, can we expect any changes within the television industry?*

Centerwall: The television industry has an enormous financial interest in keeping programming as profitable as possible, which is entirely reasonable in a capitalist economy. One of the most reliable ways of generating profitable programming on television is through the use of violence.

So despite whatever statements might be made, over the past 20-30 years the television industry has consistently avoided any real change in the amount of violence it puts on television. I don't anticipate that will be different in the future.

To return to the cigarette analogy, it is not reasonable to expect the tobacco industry to behave in a socially responsible fashion about growing tobacco. That's how it makes its money. The idea of asking industry members to reduce the amount of tobacco they grow out of their sense of social conscience, is absurd. They won't do it. The same applies to the television industry and for exactly the same reasons. It is entirely against their interest to decrease the amount of violence on television.

M&V: *What, then, would you suggest concerned parents do?*

Centerwall: In 1990, The American Academy of Pediatrics issued a statement advising parents to limit their children's television viewing to one to two hours per day. That's an important first step. One to two hours of TV watching a day may not seem like much of a limitation, but if parents were to endorse such a limit it would mean a 50 percent reduction for most children.

Parents should also encourage other interests and activities besides watching television. It's often said that television will work well for children if parents will take the time to watch the programs with the child and discuss programs with them. I agree, but I also feel that if a parent is really going to spend time with the child, their time would be better spent not watching TV. Parents should be teaching their children how to create their own self-growth, hobbies, interests and friendships. Television has a very real role to play in a child's life, but it should be a lesser means of entertainment rather than the first choice.

In 1990, handguns were used to kill:

10 people in Austraila
13 in Sweden
22 in Great Britain
68 in Canada
87 in Japan
91 in Switzerland
10,567 in the United States

– Handgun Control, Inc., poster

[TV programmers] are guilty of murder, as far as I can see. They all are. Me too.

Ted Turner

Working in Partnership

The first five articles in this section are edited with permission from remarks made at a panel discussion at Harvard University's School of Public Health in May, 1992. Experts from social science and medical research, the entertainment community and public interest groups met to discuss the state of violence on the screen and how to deal with it. The event was organized with the assistance of Mediascope, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit advocacy organization working to improve the depiction of health and social issues in entertainment. The Center for Media and Values thanks Mediascope for advice and support as a collaborator on this issue.

No Doubt About It – Media Violence Affects Behavior

Conference remarks by Leonard D. Eron

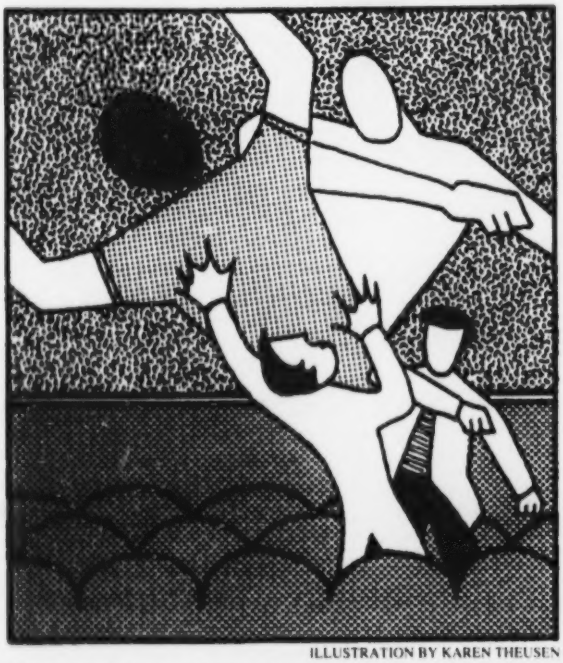


ILLUSTRATION BY KAREN THEUSEN

The scientific debate is over. Ever since the first studies came out in the early '60s relating increased aggressiveness in children to the violent content of the television programs they were watching, there have been a few naysayers who have criticized the studies because, they claimed, the effects were too small to be meaningful or the behaviors which were affected were not serious antisocial acts.

However, a recent summary of over 200 studies published in 1990, using state-of-the-art meta-analysis procedures *[Ed. note: a method which merges the findings of multiple studies]* offers convincing evidence that the observation of violence, as seen in standard everyday television entertainment, does affect the aggressive behavior of the viewer. All types of aggressive behavior, including illegal behaviors and criminal violence, demonstrated highly significant effects associated with the exposure to television violence. The behaviors affected by viewing television violence are cause for social concern.

Although the scientific debate may be over, the public policy debate is only beginning to heat up...What can be done? As soon as the suggestion for action comes up, the TV industry raises the issue of censorship, violation of First Amendment rights and abrogation of the [U.S.] Constitution. For many years now Western European countries have monitored TV and films and have not permitted the showing of excess violence, especially during child-viewing hours. I have never heard of any complaints by citizens in those democratic countries that their rights have been violated.

In the U.S. youth violence is a public health problem, so designated by the Centers for Disease Control, which has described the situation as an epidemic which must be brought under control. No one is claiming that TV violence is the sole cause of this epidemic. However, it is certainly one of the causes, and one which we at least can do something about. The research that psychologists have done can offer guidelines on how to present violence [in television shows and films] to minimize its harmful effect on children...

In the spring [of 1992] we had to face the implications of the uncontrolled violence in Los Angeles. TV cannot escape its share of the responsibility for this outburst. We know that children living in the inner city watch more TV than other children. [They] are increasingly surrounded by violence—at home, in the neighborhood, on the way to and from school. They are constantly dodging bullets, cowering in hallways, hiding under tables, because the streets are so dangerous from drive-by shootings and other violence. They spend more and more time indoors watching TV.

And what do they see on TV? More violence. This validates what the children have seen in the neighborhood, it makes violence normative—everyone's doing it, not just in their neighborhood but all over. TV represents violence as an appropriate way to solve interpersonal problems, to get what you want out of life, avenge slights and insults and make up for perceived injustices.

As A.M. Rosenthal of the New York Times said: "It's not against the [U.S.] Constitution to turn away from the box office, click that clicker or cancel a subscription. Violence portrayed on the screen in the cause of truth is essential. Violence made fashionable in the cause of a buck is unworthy of people of talent. Aren't those who do that becoming ashamed of themselves? Haven't they discovered that 'ketchup' can become blood?"

Leonard D. Eron is research scientist and professor of psychology, Research Center for Group Dynamics, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, and Research Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois at Chicago.

View From the Network: What Counts as Violence?

Conference remarks by Horst Stipp

I don't quite agree... that the scientific debate on television violence is over. Even among... researchers... there is considerable debate over what kind of violence creates what result and in which way. That becomes particularly important to the issue of standards because if you really want to do something about the problem, then you have to be able to define [it].

***In my opinion, there's less violence in leading programs such as* 60 Minutes *and* Murder, She Wrote *in the whole season than throughout the opening credits of* The Terminator.**

So, what is the problem? Common definitions of television violence in entertainment programs include murders, assaults and fist fights. They include police arresting a criminal, when an earthquake destroys a house and depictions of war scenes in a movie about World War II or Vietnam. Science fiction battles with fantasy weapons that nobody could possibly imitate are also included.

Accidents, such as a man falling on a banana peel, are counted as acts of violence in the most widely used violence counts by Professor George Gerbner [of the University of Pennsylvania]... And of course, since we often hear that there is more violence in television cartoons than anywhere else, that count comes about because every slapstick accident... in cartoons is being counted.

I feel privileged to work for one of the three broadcast television networks, because we have standards and the cable channels do not. We have a process that has been in existence since the beginning of television, where the content of what goes on the air, whether entertainment or advertising, is being reviewed, the scripts are being reviewed and changes are being made. (News, of course, is clearly separate).

We try to reduce the amount of violence. A lot of people don't realize that we also apply standards to theatrical movies. In contrast, a channel like Home Box Office actually advertises that on HBO you get to see these films uncensored, unedited. We take violence out and they leave it in.

So, what do our standards say? They are quite general, but we do seek to avoid explicit, excessive and gratuitous violence. We seek not to glamorize violence, promote violence as a problem solver, or invite violent imitation. We take extra care when children are involved, with a separate section in our codes dealing with children's programs. There is a whole catalogue of things that should be taken into consideration with children, including the negative consequences of violence and the use of fantasy settings in order to avoid imitation.

If you compare the most-watched programs on network television with what's in the movie theaters or appears on your various cable channels, especially pay cable channels, we're doing OK. Nearly all top programs are sitcoms. The only Top 10 show with some violence is *Murder, She Wrote* — which has less violence in the whole season than the opening credits of *The Terminator*.

...In this open society, if you want to really reduce the amount of violence available, if you want to have standards, then everybody's got to adhere to them. The networks agreed to have standards... but you see a whole different level of violence, both in amount and intensity, on all those other channels. You haven't really achieved anything until you get everyone to agree to the same standards. And that is a real challenge.

Horst Stipp is director of Social and Development Research at NBC.

Re:ACTION

Define Media Violence for Yourself

Critics of television violence research note that media violence experts measure television violence quite differently. George Gerbner of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication measures most acts of violence equally, whether an accident or intentional. The National Coalition on Television Violence "weighs" violence so a minor act like shoving counts as one-third of an act of violence while murder counts as one and two-thirds an act of violence. Judge for yourself by developing your own definition of media violence and putting it to the test:

- First, develop your own definition of violence. Keep in mind things like motives (revenge or passion), consequences (death or financial reward), techniques (shootouts or fist fights), intentions (to frighten or to kill). Does violence always mean physical harm?

- Second, as you watch television, count the acts of violence according to your definition. Make sure to note who are the perpetrators and who are the victims. How are these characters different in terms of gender, race and class? Do all the acts of violence fall neatly within your definition?

- Finally, evaluate your results. What values went into your definition? Are certain types of violence used more often than others? How does the violence change over time and program? What patterns of violence emerge in terms of gender, race and class?

Slasher Films May Be Kids' Introduction to Sex

Conference remarks by Edward Donnerstein

The violence in the mass media has become much more extreme in the last decade... My own concern has been with sexual violence in the mass media... A very recent content analysis of popular R-rated "slasher films" indicates that at least one-third of the women who are killed in these films are killed within some type of sexual context...

Because of cable and video rentals, a young male or female's first introduction to anything that might deal with human sexuality and the nude body could take place within a violent context. Their first introduction to anything dealing with sex could be from *I Spit On Your Grave* or *Toolbox Murders*, films which many of you probably haven't heard about but, rest assured, many young adolescents have. The violence is extreme, and the violence takes place within some type of sexual context.

Initially those films would have never been directed toward young children because of ratings, but within the video market the ratings system really has no place. It is not utilized. So your young adolescent male or female, 11 or 12 years old, can rent *I Spit On Your Grave*, which is R-rated, with no problem at all. The rating basically has no value in the store.

But... the current MPAA rating system is based primarily upon what is offensive to parents, not what is harmful to children. There is absolutely no use of social science research in that rating system, as far as I can tell. Sex is consistently more offensive than violence. There is a real contradiction when *Rain Man* is rated R and *Conan the Destroyer* is rated PG. Sex and words about sex are the issue.

I'd like to strongly advocate educational intervention to teach children [and] adolescents, to be more media literate; to help them be more critical viewers of the type of mass media...they see. They need to understand what violence is, and to understand myths about sexual violence, particularly rape. Critical viewing skills, media literacy, educational intervention are very viable alternative ways of dealing with the problem.

The networks are not going to do programs on the problems of television violence... However, they have done some very constructive programs dealing with violence. One was *She Said No*, an NBC film dealing with acquaintance rape. It was very realistic, and it had a public service announcement after the show to deal with the problems of date rape.

...Research on the impact of that particular program... found that it was able to raise people's consciousness about date rape, acquaintance rape, and was able to make [viewers] more aware of the seriousness of violence against women in general. The ABC program, "Peter Jennings Reporting: Men, Sex and Rape," a documentary on date rape and rape in general, followed by a two-hour panel [discussion] afterwards was another good example.

[To summarize], legal restrictions will not work and should not be advocated. The ratings system needs massive change before it will be effective. I advocate educational programs, critical viewing programs, and hopefully, the entertainment industry will join us to deal with the topic of violence.

Edward Donnerstein, chair of the Department of Communications, University of California/Santa Barbara, is co-author of a 1992 American Psychological Association study on Youth and Violence. He is a longtime scholar of the incidence and effect of sexual violence in the media.

I'd like to strongly advocate educational intervention to teach children [and] adolescents, to be more media literate; to help them be more critical viewers...

Media Violence: Japan vs. America

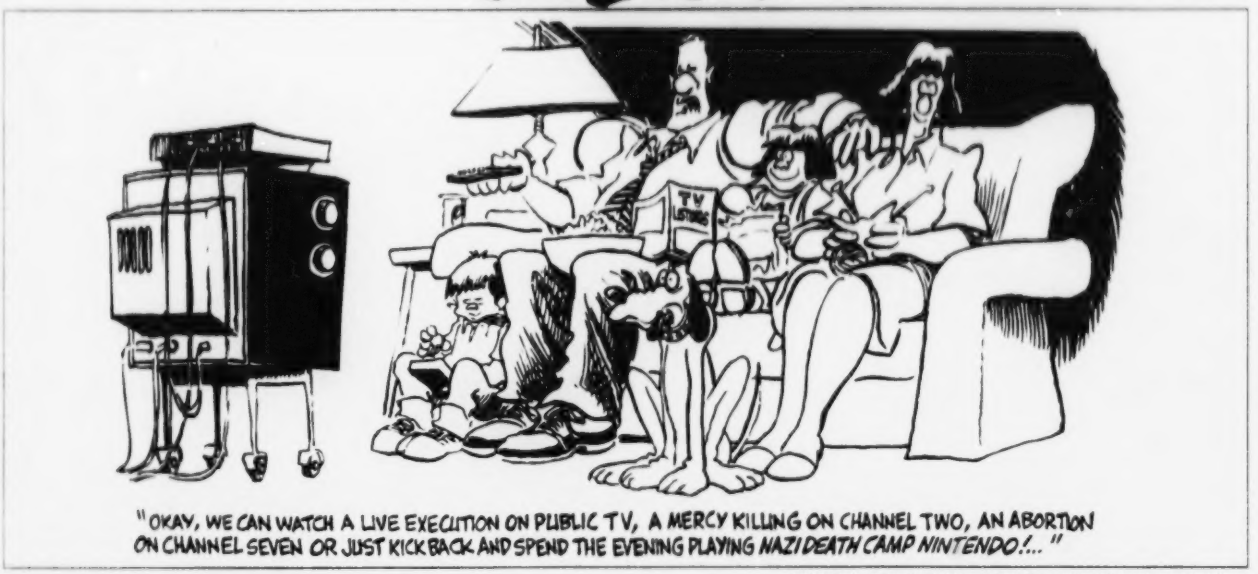
Is the relationship between media and societal violence a function of the quantity of the images or the way the violence is presented? A 1981 study comparing Japanese and American television found major differences in the way violence is portrayed on screen between the two countries.

One of the major findings was that the amount of violence on Japanese and American television is roughly the same. The nature of the Japanese television violence, however, is different. Violent scenes are less frequent in Japanese-produced programs, yet tend to last longer, are more realistic and place a much greater emphasis on physical suffering.

The study also found that the violent acts in American-produced programs were equally performed by "good guys" and "bad guys," and the assaults were overwhelmingly against villains—individuals for whom the audience has little compassion and whose demise is often cheered. In Japanese-produced shows more than twice as many violent acts were performed by "bad guys," with the heroes suffering the consequences 75 percent of the time.

The researchers concluded that, compared to American shows, Japanese programs emphasize the consequences of violence. The modern-day hero in Japanese drama, much like the classic samurai figure, is noble, honest, highly disciplined and hard-working. When these heroes are wounded or killed, it arouses distress and evokes sympathy rather than applause.

Edited from Mediascope press release, March 1993. Reprinted with permission.



"OKAY, WE CAN WATCH A LIVE EXECUTION ON PUBLIC TV, A MERCY KILLING ON CHANNEL TWO, AN ABORTION ON CHANNEL SEVEN OR JUST KICK BACK AND SPEND THE EVENING PLAYING *NAZI DEATH CAMP NINTENDO!...* "

BY PERMISSION OF DOUG MARLETTE AND CREATORS SYNDICATE

Writers Tell Stories Of a Violent Society

Conference remarks by Del Reisman

Networks, as you know, follow. They do not lead. Networks react to social change and community standards. I know. I have served as a story editor on many weekly series. Story editors scan the headlines, searching for ways to paraphrase the truth and put it into fictional form. They give their running characters attitudes, points of view about the subject matter and about their relationships, creating conflict. Then they develop guest characters who set it all in motion.

Networks, as you know follow. They do not lead. Networks react to social change and community standards.

I believe that additional guidelines for violence should not be called for because they will simply reduce the actual sights of some violence but not the threatening storytelling that builds to it, and therefore such guidelines would be a crumb thrown to those who believe in a causal relationship (*i.e.* that violence in fictional story-telling induces violence in real life)...

I believe that writers should continue to tell the stories of our time. Abuse in the home toward children, or parents or grandparents is out of the closet now, thanks to its dramatization on television... The violence on the home screen follows the violence in our lives.

It is possible, in the near future, as a result of the Los Angeles civil unrest, that some kind of strong emotionally-charged statement will come out of the networks, a pledge to increased responsibility, a refusal to deal in "gratuitous" violence. I hope so. Members of the Writers Guild will cooperate, if such is the case. But I've been there before.

We've lived with Broadcast Standards for 40 years, fighting the departments frequently, losing most of the fights, but reacting positively as networks followed changes in community standards from the days of no "hells" and no "damns" to today's relatively explicit language, frank relationships and open dramatizations of dysfunctional families.

...Writers are family people too... we are community-minded and we care deeply about the world around us. We are as shocked and concerned by what is happening on our streets, on our schoolyards, in our classrooms and in our homes, as any of you. We agree on very little but we do agree on fundamentals, such as freedom of expression and freedom from censorship, the official kind and the unofficial kind which induces self-censorship... Do we eliminate stories which deal with violent behavior because the unstable people in our society may be stimulated to imitate?

Writers can do a better job of satisfying our own artistic impulses, as well as our own sense of responsibility. We can do a much better job than we're doing now in dealing with the root causes of hopelessness, to try to understand the many-chambered heart. For now, I ask you to continue to let us tell our stories within the difficult constraints of a medium that measures success only after at least 10 million homes are reached.

Television and motion pictures are market-driven. If people don't go, the pictures won't be made. It's very simple. If people rush to see some of the simple, intimate stories that are now being filmed, then more would be made. Regrettably very few people rush to see them. And many, many millions throughout the world go to see the big expensive, splashy, violent films. It really is a question of audience response.

Del Reisman is president of the Writers Guild of America, West, as well as a long-time screenwriter.

In The News:

Media Violence Making Headlines

As we were going to press, there was considerable public atttention focused on the issue of violence on television. Some noteworthy events:

- In March 1993, the National Cable Television Association released an industry policy statement regarding violence shown on cable programming. The statement is one point of a four-part plan to reduce the amount of violence in cable.
- Two Congressional hearings on television violence were held in May, 1993. Testifying before a Senate committee led by Sen. Paul Simon (D.Ill.) and Edward J. Markey (D.Mass.), the heads of all the major networks (NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox) vowed to continue regulating the depiction of violence in network programming. All agreed that the networks were making progress in reducing the amount of violence but confessed more could be done.
- On June 30, 1993, one day before yet another Senate hearing on television violence, the major networks announced that beginning with the fall 1993 schedule, programs containing scenes of violence will include a parental advisory before airing. Though most critics of television violence applaud the move, some question its effectiveness since the advisories are placed at the networks' discretion and do not apply to children's cartoons or cable programming.
- An industry-wide conference on violence in the media sponsored by the National Council for Families and Television will be held in Los Angeles on August 2, 1993. Attending this national meeting will be representatives from all aspects of the television and film industry, as well as political, educational and community leaders.

The Center for Media and Values will continue to monitor current events and will report the latest developments in our next issue.

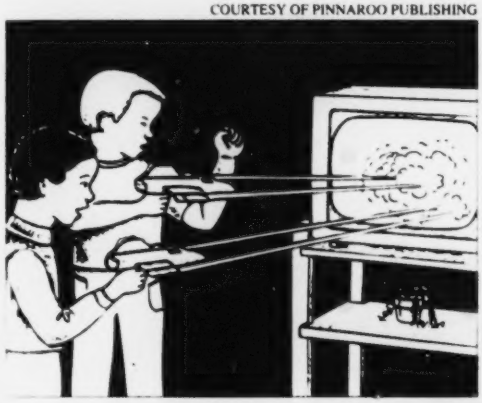
Public Policy Must Focus On Causes of Violence

Conference remarks by Peggy Charren

In 1968, when Action for Children's Television started, there was no cable TV, there was no home video. There were three networks and most of what we saw, even on independent stations, went through the networks. It was easy to make codes. It was easy to talk about controlling violence...

It's a different media world out there since the network-dominated late '60s. When you get broadcasters promoting a toy like Captain Power, where the toy shoots the television show and then the television show shoots back at the kid, [it] has to be one of the most peculiar ideas in the history of toys in this country. And the unfortunate thing is that it really was selling. That toy was turned into a TV show because it wasn't writers who controlled what kids were getting from television, it was toy manufacturers. If the toys are violent, so are the shows for the target audience, kids...

COURTESY OF PINNAROO PUBLISHING



A toy like Captain Power... has to be one of the most peculiar ideas in the history of toys in this country.

Let's assume, for purposes of argument, that everything the researchers say is true. So, what are you going to do about it? Well, there's self-regulation. When the codes were in full effect in the '70s, the National Association of Broadcasters had created a terrific code. But the stuff on television wasn't so terrific.

The use of disclosures is another way media representatives talk about dealing with violence. If you tell everybody, "Hey, this program is going to be terribly violent and scare the wits out of you," you'll get every teenager in America watching it.

The Children's Television Act [of 1990] does require stations to provide some programs specifically designed to meet the informational and educational needs of children, and to keep a record of what they're doing to meet the mandate of this new law. But it won't work unless all of us make sure the station understands that we know there's a law, too, and ask them what they're doing to educate children...

The Communications Act of 1934, which was organized for radio, and adapted for television, says, in return for this license to use a piece of the public resource we call the broadcast spectrum, you have to serve the public. It's supposed to mean a diversity of programs, of formats, of the kinds of things you would expect in a library —not toy-based programs for children...

We need public policy to focus on the root causes of violence in this country. Poverty is what you fix if you want to do something about violence. Invest money in children so we don't have violent teenagers and adults. Allocate increased resources for health care, child care, housing, education and jobs. But I think the very best solution comes in the voting booth when we have an opportunity to vote for leaders who have their priorities set straight.

Peggy Charren is the founder of Action for Children's Television.

Suggestions For Parents: Children Can Unlearn Violence

By Judith Myers-Walls

As a child development professional with two school-age children, my primary concern regarding my children's exposure to television is the violence they see. Although there are some sexual themes on television that are too intense for them, and a steady diet of adult language is likely to lead to problems, it is the violence that bothers me the most.

Critics worry that children will imitate the violent acts they have seen, either as children or youth or as adults. I do not worry about that; my children are not likely to participate in criminal aggression. Minor aggression can be a problem, though. What parent has not had to control the children's karate chops after they watched the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles?

Traumatized by TV Violence

A more realistic concern for me is that my children may be traumatized by televised violence. When the unthinkable is presented, not only does it become thinkable, but it may become haunting. A study in Kuwait after the Persian Gulf War found that some children who were nowhere near the violence showed more trauma symptoms than those who were—a result of being shown propaganda videos of torture and violence.

A diet of violent programming could teach my children that the world is a dangerous place. They could assume that murders, rapes and kidnappings take place in the real world at the same rate as on television, which, fortunately, is still far from true. They might become convinced that there are evil people everywhere who threaten the safety of good people. Most significantly, television teaches that the only way to deal with those people is by being violent yourself, because TV teaches that that is the only way to control evil people.

Like others their age, my children and their friends do their best to appear unaffected by the media violence they see, so they will not appear weak or prudish. With some children, it can become a contest. The quantity of violent media and the impersonal but graphic way violent content is presented can lead quickly to a tough, unaffected response. Such desensitized children learn to avoid taking responsibility for the violence around them; they may even be able to watch a real life violent event with no emotional response and no sense of personal obligation to react.

A diet of violent programming could teach my children that the world is a dangerous place.

Too Much Violent Fun

Cartoons and other children's programming present their own problems. They may even contain more violent actions, but the real problem is their presentation of violence as fun and entertaining. Violent actions have no lasting consequences, and it is proper to laugh when a character gets hit in the head with a mallet or gets smashed flat. This may teach children to laugh when real people get hurt. Booby traps and falls become funny.

The *Home Alone* movies put that same consequence-free slapstick humor in a realistic setting. I watched my son and his friends sketch out and reenact that movie over and over. Finally, my son and another seven-year-old boy drove a nail through a board and left it point up on the other boy's basement stairs. The friend was surprised and sobered when his mother's foot bled after she stepped on it. "There wasn't any blood when they did it in the movie," he said.

Media critics call for voluntary restraint or regulation to reduce the amount of violence in the media. But that solution takes time. I cannot wait while the larger public policy issues are addressed.

Making Connections at Home

A first step I take is to help my children recognize the difference between reality and fantasy. We work on media literacy skills so they can recognize special effects and understand when actors are pretending to hurt one another or be hurt. To avoid the trauma that may come from violence, I try to help them distance themselves from the images.

I monitor what my children are watching, and some programs are off limits. It is important to avoid making violent programming "tabu" and therefore desirable, however. I sometimes watch milder action programs or programs with a historical background *with* my children. This satisfies their curiosity, and my comments can help provide the right context. I explain how media producers use manipulative techniques and how children can be smarter than their manipulators by refusing to be pulled in.

Most important, I teach my children alternatives to violence. The trauma and desensitization of violent programming can affect all children. But children most at risk for imitation are those whose parents' attitudes and behavior either reinforce it or leave a violence vacuum with their own attitudes unstated. That's when children are apt to imitate violence they see and hear.

A first step I take is to help my children recognize the difference between fantasy and reality.

Simply telling children that violence is not the way to deal with problems is not enough; I discuss what should be done instead. Children have many models of violent response through the media. They need models and training in nonviolence to be able to resist those images.

Judith Myers-Walls, Ph.D., is an associate professor of child development at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana. She has two children, Aaron, 8 and Amanda, 12.

Canada Adopts Five-Point Plan To Ban Violence on Television.

By H. Brooke Primero

A 13-year-old Canadian girl named Virginie Lariviere began to collect signatures in her personal campaign against television violence after her little sister was robbed, raped and strangled to death in 1991. Virginie felt there was a link between the violent programming she saw on the box and the violent manner in which her sister had been murdered.

Two years and 1.3 million signatures later Canada's Minister of Communications, Perrin Beatty, has announced the Canadian government's five-part strategy to deal with violence in television—a strategy that will ultimately involve broadcasters, producers, advertisers, educators and parents.

A key part of the strategy requires the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) to rewrite its voluntary code regulating broadcasters' use of on-air violence. Beatty intends to ask the CAB's regulating agency, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), to write and enforce its own national—and obligatory—code if the CAB's isn't deemed strict enough.

Gerard Desroches, a spokesperson from Canada's Federal Department of Communications, sees the revision as an important step. "It's a strategy that pushes buttons in many places, and brings in most of the players. A lot of pressure applied in a lot of places will bear fruit."

Beatty also appointed a National Action Group to bring together actors, producers, advertisers, broadcasters and regulatory agencies to discuss the issue of violence on television. Because 80 percent of violence on Canadian television is actually picked up from U.S. programming, joint efforts with U.S. broadcasters and regulators were seen as a key need.

U.S. Invasion

While the Canadian Government can regulate its own broadcasting, the programs received from its neighbor to the south are exempt from Canadian control. Viewers who can't find a violent show on Canadian networks before 9 p.m. can simply switch channels and see it on U.S. television. How realistic is an initiative that tackles only part of the problem?

"It is realistic up to a point," said Laurier LaPierre, past chairman of the NAG. "A classification system which will monitor [non-Canadian] media in Canada would help."

Under current regulations, Canadian broadcasters buy U.S. programming and distribute it within Canada as part of the basic cable package. Licensing laws that govern the transactions prevent Canadian cable operators from making any changes in the purchased programming. The popularity of U.S. programs demands that cable operators continue to put U.S. programs on the cable menu.

> ***"[Canada] has had the excuse for years that we will wait for the Americans. Well, we cannot wait for the Americans anymore."***

LaPierre hopes that further agreements with U.S. broadcasters would allow prebroadcast warnings to advise parents of violent content. Beyond that, LaPierre believes that media education can help children learn to distinguish between what is real and unreal in TV violence. Such awareness can help develop—instead of blunt—sensitivity to the physical and psychological degredation that violence represents.

Parental Guidance Suggested

For these reasons, LaPierre believes, parents should take their child's television menu seriously.

"I want everybody to do their job," he said. "I say to the (television) industry: it's not your job to force Ms. Jones to turn the TV off. But we must start to do something about this general assault that is furthered by poverty and illiteracy. I don't want to let anybody off the hook.

"(Canada) has had the excuse for years that we will wait for the Americans. Well, we cannot wait for the Americans anymore. Our rate of national violence is going up, and we must do something about it."

H. Brooke Primero is a journalism student at the University of Southern California and an editorial assistant for Media&Values.

How Canada Will Act

- **Standards.** The Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) has recently rewritten its voluntary code regulating violent content in dramas and music videos. It will be evaluated, enforced and, if necessary, strengthened by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), which regulates Canadian broadcasting.
- **International Cooperation.** Canada will work with the U.S. on a joint effort to curb violent programming.
- **Public Education.** A planned campaign includes public service announcements as well as a number of media-literacy initiatives through schools, churches and community organizations.
- **Advertising.** Canada's major advertisers will be encouraged not to place ads within violent television programs
- **Awards.** The creation of the "Virginie Lariviere Television Award" will recognize those whose contributions help to make television less violent.

A free report, TV Violence: Fraying Our Social Fabric, *detailing Canada's efforts to curb media violence, is available by calling Liberal Party Cultural official Sheila Finestone's office at (613)995-0121.*

THE VIOLENCE FORMULA

How To Analyze for Violence in TV, Movies and Video

By Barbara Osborn

Violence is the foundation of many films, TV movies and action series. In fact, violence is often synonymous with "action." Because screenwriters, directors and producers use violence often and in many ways, how do we begin to recognize the distinctions in media violence? How do we determine if a shootout or fist fight is one too many? One way is to understand that there is a basic formula to the portrayal of violence in TV, movies and video. Here are the three basics of the formula. On the back are questions to help you recognize them:

1. Violence Drives the Storyline

Without the violence, there would be no story. A crime, a murder, a fist fight are used to launch TV and movie plots. Violence is often the very pretext for the action that follows.

Take a look at your daily TV listings. Among films and TV movies, you're liable to find titles like *Show of Force, Hell Squad, The Killers, The Naked and the Dead, The Plot to Murder Hitler, They Were Expendable, Masters of Menace, Missing in Action 2: The Beginning*, and *Conan The Destroyer*. (These titles were collected by quickly leafing through a single issue of *TV Guide*.)

TV action series demonstrate a similar inclination for violence driving the story. An episode of *Street Justice* promises: "The brother of a suspected cop killer abducts Malloy in order to silence Beaudreaux, who is the only witness to the crime." On *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "Geordi finds himself drawn romantically to a Starfleet lieutenant who is suspected of murder." On a rerun of *Father Dowling Mysteries*: "Someone takes a shot at Dowling and the culprit appears to be an angry excon Dowling helped send up the river on a murder rap."

TV and film plots begin with violence, and impending conflict continues to drive the story. The hero is never safe. Danger is always just around the corner. As the story unfolds, outbreaks of violence against people and property make sure that viewers stay in their seats.

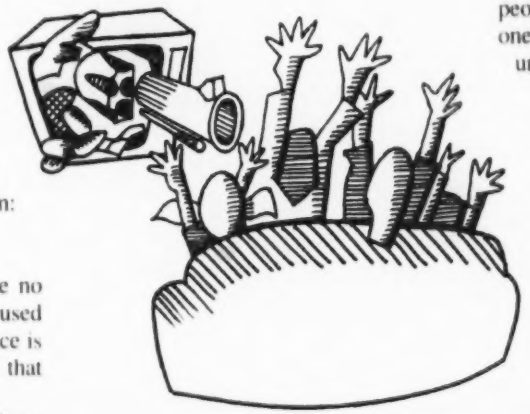


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN SANTOS

2. Violence Has No Consequences

TV violence doesn't bleed. There are lots of shootouts and fist fights, but amazingly no one gets seriously hurt. TV rarely shows the consequences of violence. Guardians of law and order, whether Maxwell Smart, Kojak, or the Miami Vice squad, emerge from their conflicts with little more than scrapes. Occasionally, unlucky characters (but never the hero!) end up in a nice, clean hospital bed.

In general, films depict bleeding, the immediate consequence of violence, more often than TV. In fact, horror movies celebrate gooey, graphic, gory scenes. But even in these films, the real world consequences of violence–the physical handicaps, financial expense, and emotional cost–are never a part of the plot.

Perhaps the most chilling aspect of the media's portrayal of violence is that when people are killed, they simply disappear. No one mourns their deaths. Their lives are unimportant.

3. A World of Good and Bad

Media violence takes place in a world of good and bad. In most TV programs and movies, viewers' emotions have to be enlisted very quickly. Starkly contrasting good and bad characters help accomplish this. Deeper, more realistic, more ambiguous characterizations make it hard for viewers to know whom to root for. It also requires more screen time that takes away from onscreen action.

As a result, TV and film criminals are reduced to caricatures. They are 100 percent bad. No one could care about them. They have no families. Many of them don't even have full names, only nicknames. They deserve no sympathy and they get exactly what they deserve.

Bad guys have to be really bad otherwise good guys wouldn't be justified in clobbering them. Good guys are peaceable. They are driven to violence only as a last resort in their struggle against these bad, bad people. Good guy violence is justified. To see how this self-justifying formula works, ask a child why a particular character is getting beat up. The answer is simple: "He's a bad guy."

Barbara Osborn is a media literacy teacher and freelance journalist in Los Angeles.

MEMBERS MAY COPY THESE TWO PAGES
FOR DISCUSSION OR GROUP ACTIVITY

REFLECTION RESOURCE

Verify the Violence Formula for Yourself and To Teach Others

Watch a popular action show, TV movie or action film. Keep track of specific acts of violence such as shouting, hitting, shooting, car crashes and vandalism. (An interesting thing you'll notice if you skip through the channels looking for violent TV shows is that violence is a staple in some TV genres like crime and action shows, reality series, movies and cartoons and virtually nonexistent in others). As you watch, apply the violence formula yourself by asking the following questions:

Violent Storylines

- What role does violence play in the program?
- Would there be a story without the violent conflict?
- Is the violence used at intervals throughout the story to add excitement?
- Was this story developed because it is violent, or is it a valuable story of human relationships in which violence is a necessary and integral part?

Violent Consequences

- Are consequences of the violence shown? If so, what purpose does it serve the plot? How does it develop a character?
- Do you see people hurt or bleeding onscreen?
- Do those who die during the action simply disappear?
- Are the economic and social consequences of violence clear? If not, how would the story change if they were shown?

Good Guys/Bad Guys

- How are the "good guys" and "bad guys" portrayed?
- Why do the "bad guys" use violence? Why do the "good guys" use violence?
- Do the "bad guys" have family or others who will care if they get hurt or killed?
- What kinds of violence do the "good guys" use? How do their acts of violence differ from those used by the "bad guys"?

Some Deeper Questions...

Now consider the impact of the media's portrayal of violence. Media violence has a different effect on children than it does on adults.

CHILDREN model behavior they see in the media. If kids don't see the consequences of violence, it teaches them that violence doesn't cause serious harm. When heroes use violence it sends a message that violence is an appropriate way to respond to problems. *If you were a child, what lessons about the world might you learn from the program you just watched?*

ADULTS see much more violence in the media than actually exists in real life. That's because producers believe that they have to include extraordinary violence in order to keep viewers interested. As a result, heavy TV viewers may think that the world is more dangerous and violent than it actually is. This phenomenon (as formulated by George Gerbner of the University of Pennsylvania) is often called the "mean world" syndrome. *How high is your mean world quotient? Do the shows you watch make you feel more fearful?*

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND VALUES
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WATCH, READ, LISTEN

Resources for Violence in the Media

IN PRINT

Preposterous Violence: Fables of Aggression in Modern Culture by James B. Twitchwell looks at the history of violent entertainment and its modern forms and attractions, (1989). Oxford University Press, 201 Evans Rd., Cary, NC 27531-2009; (800)451-7556, $30.

Faces of the Enemy: The Psychology of Enmity by Sam Keen shows how ad images and political cartoons promote hatred (1988). Harper and Row/Harper San Francisco, 1150 Battery St., San Francisco, CA 94111-1213; (800)328-5125; $16.95.

TV Interactive Toys: The New High Tech Threat To Children by Pamela Tuchscherer evaluates the violent impact of TV-originated toys for children and suggests critical viewing skills to counter their effects (1988). Pinnaroo Publishing, P.O. Box 38, Adell, OR 97620; (503)947-5002, $12.95.

"Teaching Our Kids to Kill" chapter 3 from ***Deadly Consequences: How Violence Is Destroying Our Teenage Population and a Plan to Begin Solving the Problem*** by Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D. is an excellent summary of media/violence issues (1991). Harper Perennial, HarperCollins, P.O. Box 588, Keystone Industrial Park, Scranton, PA 18512; (800)331-3761, $12.

Understanding and Preventing Violence. A National Research Council team reviews the literature on the general causes and possible remedies for violence. Edited by Albert J. Reiss, Jr. and Jeffrey A. Roth (1993). National Academy Press, Box 285, 2101 Constitution Ave., Washington, DC 20055; (800)624-6242, $49.95.

Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media: A Pastoral Response from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, examines the impact of media on social change (1989). Office for Publishing and Promotion Services, U.S. Catholic Conference, 3211 4th St., NE, Washington, DC 20017-1194; (800)235-8722, $1.95.

Violence and Sexual Violence in Film, Television and Home Video, a policy statement of the National Council of Churches (1986/1992). NCC, 475 Riverside Dr., #572, New York, NY 10115; (212)870-2377, free.

Video Violence and Values: A Workshop on the Impact of Video Violence by Dave Pomeroy offers three sessions for adults and young people on violence in "slasher" films (1990). Friendship Press, P.O. Box 37844, Cincinnati, OH 45222-0844; (513)948-8733, $5.95.

Check your local library for the following:

TV and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence by the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, is a classic violence study (1972).

"What Won't They Do?" by Ken Auletta discusses what Hollywood decision-makers see as the entertainment industry's responsibility to the public in creating programming for TV and film. ***The New Yorker***, May 17, 1993.

"TV Violence" the March 26, 1993 issue of ***The Congressional Quarterly Researcher*** is a thorough and comprehensive summary dedicated to examining violence on television and its implications for our society.

"Television and Violence: The Scale of the Problem and Where to Go From Here," from the June 10, 1992 issue of ***Journal of the American Medical Association***. The original report of Brandon S. Centerwall's research referred to in his interview on pp. 12-13.

SIGHT/SOUND

The World is a Dangerous Place: Images of the Enemy in Children's Television, a video with leader's guide, examines stereotypes of the enemy in cartoons, 13 min. (1989). Center for Psychology and Social Change, 1493 Cambridge St., Cambridge, MA 02139; (617)497-1553, $40.

Warning: The Media May Be Hazardous to Your Health analyzes how advertising objectifies women leading to toleration of violence and exploitation in media and in society, 36 min. (1990). Media Watch, P.O. Box 618, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-0618; (408)423-6355, $150.

On Television: The Violence Factor part 1 of *On Television* series looks at the three decades of debate about effects of violence in TV news and entertainment programs, 56 min. (1984). California Newsreel, 149 9th St., San Francisco, CA 94103; (415)621-6196, $49.

ORGANIZATIONS

National Coalition on Television Violence is a nonprofit organization that monitors TV violence and uses boycotts, its newsletter and Gandhi awards to initiate change. 247 S. Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, CA 90212; 310-278-5433.

Mediascope works with the TV and film communities to promote positive social and public health images in entertainment media through forums, seminars and workshops. Also publish informative fact sheets and documentary films. 12711 Ventura Blvd., Ste. 250, Studio City, CA 91604; (818)508-2080.

BEYOND BLAME

Media Literacy as Violence Prevention

By Elizabeth Thoman
Executive Director

Beyond the blame... beyond the debate... are human beings—children, young people and adults of all ages—who are daily bombarded with violent images from the media and popular culture.

The parameters of this problem, as we've seen in the pages of this issue, are complex and interrelated. There are First Amendment concerns as well as public policies resulting from the deregulation of the media industry during the Reagan years. And as Walter Wink so eloquently writes in the first article, violence is the very stuff of our fundamental mythologies, including the myth of the American West.

Violence cannot simply be sanitized out of our culture even if, as I predict, and hope, gruesome and gratuitous violence becomes "politically incorrect" in popular entertainment. Over the decades, we've seen the media industry "self censor" many negative ideas and images from the *Amos 'n Andy* stereotype of African Americans to the use of alcohol, cigarettes and even hard drugs. Excessive violence can be added to the list.

But there will still be violence in life, and in the media, because there is evil in the world and human nature has its shadow side. Grinding poverty and substance abuse and meaninglessness create a seedbed for violence as a way for some to cope with injustice. Such violence will find its way into the news and storylines of both high art and popular culture.

Media literacy must be a necessary component of any effective effort at violence prevention, for both individuals and society as a whole.

After months of researching and working on this issue, it is clear to me that media literacy must be a necessary component of any effective effort at violence prevention, for both individuals and society as a whole.

Programs of media literacy do not excuse the storytellers of society from their share of responsibility for our cultural environment. But here are five ways I believe that media literacy can contribute to lessening the impact and incidence of violence in our lives.

1. Reduce exposure to media violence, particularly of the young, by educating parents and caregivers about the issue and helping them to develop and enforce age-appropriate viewing limits. Adults must come to realize that media violence today is different than when they were growing up. Programs of media literacy for parents can help get the message out that too much media violence can truly harm children.

2. Change the impact of violent images that *are* seen—by *deconstructing* the techniques used to stage violent scenes and *decoding* the various depictions of violence in different genres—news, cartoons, drama, sports and music.

It is important for children to learn early on the difference between reality and fantasy and to know how costumes and camera angles and special effects can fool or demerize them. Media literacy activities need to be integrated into every learning environment—schools, clubs, churches.

3. Locate and explore alternatives to storytelling that highlight violence as the preferred solution to human conflict. Schools, libraries and families (and don't forget grandparents) need to have access to books and tapes that provide positive role models to help counterbalance the actions and attitudes of today's "superheroes." Through media literacy classes, parents can also learn to transform undesirable images from popular culture into opportunities for positive modeling. One father, for example, let his child watch *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, but only if the child would imagine a fifth turtle named "Gandhi." Afterwards they had a great discussion on how "Ninja Gandhi" might get the Turtles out of trouble without resorting to violence!

4. Uncover and challenge the cultural, economic and political supports for media violence—militarism, greed, competition, dominance, structural poverty — as well as the personal ways we may each be contributing to the creation or perpetuation of a mediated culture of violence. We must not forget that the root of our cherished freedom of speech was not to protect creativity but to challenge the political and economic status quo. Media literacy empowers its participants to ask hard questions of themselves, of others and of society, by applying the principles of critical thinking to experiences that look like "mindless entertainment."

5. Break the cycle of blame and promote informed and rational public debate about these issues in schools, community and civic gatherings, religious groups and the media itself. The grim reality of our current situation demands that we ask two fundamental questions of ourselves as a society: 1) What kind of culture do we want our children to grow up in? 2) Can we continue to allow media makers to profit from products that are clearly contributing to a social condition that endangers public safety? An informed public is less vulnerable to extremist views or actions.

In a bold and ambitious undertaking, the Center for Media and Values is developing an innovative commmunity education program, based on the principles of media literacy, to directly address violence in the media. Watch for it in fall, 1993. There *are* alternatives to violence. And media literacy can help us find them.

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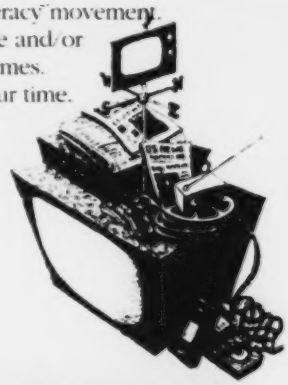

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